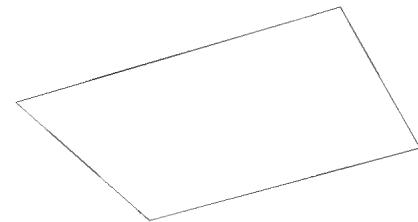


Approved For Release 15X1
2008/10/31 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010

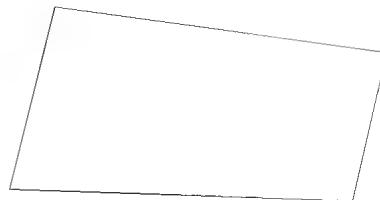
Approved For Release
2008/10/31 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010

Top Secret



25X1

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE



25X1

100
100
100
100
100

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review
completed

Top Secret

25X1



100

25X1

20 April 1973



Page Denied

25X1

20 April 1973

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINAPage

LAOS

1

A high ranking Pathet Lao delegation is visiting Hanoi and Peking to discuss military and political strategy. Both the North Vietnamese and the Chinese are publicly focusing on the need to move ahead with negotiations. Back in Laos, North Vietnamese units are going about their business as usual, getting ready for the annual rainy season.

SOUTH VIETNAM

4

25X1

25X1

In Saigon, opposition forces in the Senate are preparing to challenge the government's proposals for Senate elections this summer.

CAMBODIA

7

The fighting has settled into a fairly standard pattern--the Communists attack along a major supply route, the government reacts with mobile units which take up defensive positions and await reinforcements and air strikes. Increased Communist capability to tie up government forces, including the general reserves, is sharply reducing Phnom Penh's ability to cope with new threats.

LAOSConsultations on Laos

A delegation led by Nouhak Phoumsavan, generally regarded as the number-two Lao Communist, recently concluded a visit to Hanoi and is now in Peking. Nouhak's delegation is apparently making these trips to discuss aid agreements, but is almost certainly consulting both the North Vietnamese and the Chinese on political and military strategy also. Nouhak made similar visits last August, when the North Vietnamese were making some major decisions on their negotiating position. During both trips, Nouhak talked with top ranking North Vietnamese leaders, including Le Duan, who normally steers clear of such visitors. This time Nouhak's trip follows on the heels of Sihanouk's consultations in Hanoi, and the two visits may be part of a major North Vietnamese policy review.

The joint communique issued in Hanoi on 16 April states that the talks took place in an attitude of "complete mutual trust. The two sides reached unity of views on all subjects." The unity was predictable, since the Lao Communists have little choice but to agree with Hanoi's position. What was not predictable was a statement in the communique that the Lao Communists would "do their utmost to speed up the concrete settlement, together with the Vientiane side, of the problems provided for in the agreement." The inclusion of a specific commitment by the Communist side is highly unusual. The customary formula would be something to the effect that the US and its "lackeys" must mend their ways. This suggests either that Hanoi had an especially strong reason for making a propaganda pitch about Communist intentions to honor the agreement, or that the North Vietnamese have actually decided to instruct their clients to stop dragging their feet in the political talks--and that in either case they felt a signal to the world at large was necessary.

20 April 1973

It is possible that Hanoi has been under pressure from Peking and Moscow to show some progress in the negotiations. A Commentator article in the party daily of 7 April used language that has not been seen since the policy review last August, when it was clearly registering North Vietnamese unhappiness over Soviet and Chinese pressure.

25X1

China's Attitude

The political and military strategy of China's allies in Indochina does seem to be at center stage in Peking. The Chinese in light of Sihanouk's trip to Indochina have focused on Cambodia, and in meetings this week with Nouhak's delegation senior Chinese officials almost certainly have discussed both aid and the state of play in Laos. The Lao mission has conferred with Li Hsien-nien--whose government portfolio includes broad economic and foreign policy matters--and with ministerial-level officials concerned with foreign trade, foreign economic assistance, and Southeast Asian affairs.

Peking's desire to see Indochina defused as an issue in major power politics and recent signs that China is rethinking its military assistance policy suggest that the Chinese are counseling restraint. In public and private, the Chinese have strongly approved of the Lao cease-fire and have urged both parties to negotiate post-war political arrangements in Vientiane. Li Hsien-nien stressed this theme in remarks at a banquet for the Lao delegation on 16 April.

Peking is probably optimistic about both its own and the Lao Communists' prospects in Laos and does not want military moves that might complicate the situation.

25X1

Status of North Vietnamese Forces

Whatever the state of play on the political and diplomatic front, it is business as usual for the

20 April 1973

North Vietnamese units in Laos. There are as yet no signs that Hanoi is planning for a general withdrawal of its forces from Laos, although the Lao agreement requires that they do so within 60 days of the formation of a coalition government. North Vietnamese combat units throughout the country are involved in annual routine tasks in preparation for the five-month monsoon season which begins in mid-May.

25X1

25X1

In past years, the onset of the rains--which quickly turn the Communists' road system into a quagmire--has led Hanoi to recall a significant number of its units from north Laos and to pull back others in the south from forward positions. Some units in the central panhandle may already be leaving the front lines.

25X1

25X1

Some units could be pulled back either to North Vietnam or to base areas near the border, and Hanoi would still have adequate numbers of troops to man the front lines.

25X1

20 April 1973

-3-

25X1

SOUTH VIETNAM

Communist Military Intentions

25X1

[redacted] there is little evidence
that much more than localized action is planned. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

There is increasing evidence that the Communists
have actually been reducing their forces, at least
in the northern provinces. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

The Communists probably consider that their
existing main force units in most regions of the
South are fully adequate for the defense of the areas
they control and for conducting limited offensive
operations. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

20 April 1973

-4-

25X1

25X1

[REDACTED]

Most evidence seen so far indicates that spoiling actions are what the Communists have in mind at this point.

25X1

25X1

25X1

[REDACTED]

South Vietnamese military commanders in the northern provinces believe that recent Communist shellings and ground probes against positions along Route 1 north of Hue, for example, are designed to open up North Vietnamese supply routes to the coastal lowlands and to acquire forward staging points.

Such activity fits in with recent Communist efforts in many of the southern provinces, particularly along the main infiltration corridors north of Saigon. Communist shellings and ground attacks have picked up in eastern Tay Ninh Province. This appears to be part of a Communist effort to push government elements farther from the Saigon River corridor.

25X1

25X1

The Opposition in the Senate

South Vietnam's Senate has been the source of the only significant public criticism of the Thieu government during the past year, but even there the opposition has been relatively mute in recent months. Opposition and progovernment forces were once almost evenly split, but President Thieu's critics in the Senate, like other opposition elements, have seen their positions weakened by infighting and by a reluctance to rock the boat during the cease-fire period.

20 April 1973

Just this week, however, a Senate session became the occasion of the only open adverse reaction to President Thieu's recent trip abroad, which has received high praise in most Vietnamese circles.

The Senate also may be about to put another thorn in Thieu's side over the bill regulating the Senate election next August. Half of the Senate's 60 seats will be at stake, and Thieu is expected to make a strong effort to promote the election of Democracy Party candidates. Last January, the pro-government majority in the lower house passed an upper house election bill which contains provisions likely to favor the Democracy Party. The bill is now before the Senate and should provide an indication of opposition strength there. Opponents of the measure are trying to amend provisions that most favor the party: that only fully qualified political parties can put up slates of candidates (only the Democracy Party is now qualified); that any slate forfeit a "performance bond" if it fails to win 20 percent of the vote; and that there be slates of 15 individuals instead of the usual 10-man slates.

The US Embassy reports that there is fairly strong sentiment in the Senate to amend the bill, but it seems likely that Thieu will get his way eventually as he almost always has in the past on legislation. The President can propose amendments of his own after a bill has passed both houses of the legislature. Such amendments are rarely overridden, since to do so takes a majority of the total number of National Assembly members meeting in joint session.

25X1

20 April 1973

CAMBODIAThe Way the War Goes

The Khmer Communists' military capabilities have continued to improve since the first of the year. Communist military operations have been of longer duration, larger scale and better coordinated. The Communists are placing more emphasis on multi-battalion campaigns along vital surface lines of communication, periodically harassing such isolated provincial capitals as Takeo, Kompong Thom, and Siem Reap.

The fighting follows a familiar pattern. The Communist attacks usually begin against static Cambodian positions along a section of a major highway. The government responds--sometimes after a considerable delay--with mobile forces, which generally take up defensive positions as soon as they run into Communist resistance. The Cambodian units then wait for reinforcements and air support--and to ensure the latter government commanders often claim that they are strongly outnumbered. In the end, the Communists gradually withdraw and the government reoccupies the contested area in the face of token opposition.

There has been one noteworthy change in the government's over-all military capability over the past two months. Sustained Communist pressure on several fronts has forced the Cambodian Army to fully deploy its general reserve units, sharply reducing its ability to deal with new threats. The repeated use of the reserves has reduced their effectiveness. The recent experience of the army's best unit, the 7th Division, is a good example. In late March, the 7th was engaged in clearing operations between Phnom Penh and Takeo along Route 2, where the Khmer Communists have been particularly active. The Communists ambushed major elements of the 7th, causing substantial losses in men and materiel, forcing the division to return to

20 April 1973

[Redacted]

Phnom Penh for rest and refitting. When the division commander was ordered in mid-April to commit his battered unit to clearing operations along Route 5; he refused.

The Cambodian Army's ability to react effectively to Khmer Communist threats continues to be impeded by poor command and control. During recent operations along the Mekong, commanders were confused by intricate plans which switched major units from one position to another along the river. There was no unified command, and by mid-March the situation degenerated into five separate operations--each independent of the other. The general staff has a tendency to consider itself relieved of responsibility once mission orders are issued, and made no effort to resolve the problems.

Before the rainy season begins, the Khmer Communists will probably try to maintain--if not intensify--recent levels of military action. The Phnom Penh area and the Mekong corridor are likely to be the most active. For its part, the Cambodian Army--in the absence of any new strategy to turn the military situation around--will continue to spend its time trying to cope with Khmer Communist initiatives.

[Redacted]

25X1

20 April 1973

-8-

25X1